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A LIST OF COMMENCEMENT DAYS AT HARVARD COLLEGE, 1642-1700.

At a meeting of the MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL SOCIETY, in Boston, on Thursday, May 9, 1895, Dr. SAMUEL A. GREEN communicated the following paper:

No attempt has ever been made, so far as I know, to give a list of Commencement Days at Harvard College in early times, as gathered from contemporary records. There is a list of such days in "The New-England Historical and Genealogical Register" (XXXIII. 423) for October, 1879, prepared by Mr. John Ward Dean, the editor; but it is based largely on the statement of Cotton Mather, in his *Magnalia* (Book IV. 128), that the day "was formerly the Second *Tuesday* in *August*, but since, the first *Wednesday* in *July*." While this statement in the main is correct, the impression is left that it held true from the very beginning of the institution, which is not the fact.

Cotton Mather may have received this information from his father, who entered college in 1651, though he did not graduate until 1656. Under date of February 18, 1690-1, while in London, Increase Mather writes: "I was sent to Harvard Colledge at Cambridge in N. E. in the year 1651 when I was but 12 years old: there continued 6 years" (Proceedings, 2d series, VIII. 347). A change in the day had been made the very year he went to Cambridge; and long afterward Mather, knowing that Commencement during his college course came in August, may have told the fact to his son in a general way, leaving the inference — which he himself might well have believed — that before his time the day always fell

on the second Tuesday of August. As a matter of record for some years previous to 1651, it came on the last Tuesday of July, and before that even as late in the year as September or October.

In the following list of Commencements I have appended the authorities, under each year, for the several statements in regard to them. I have had occasion to use Mr. Sibley's *Harvard Graduates* so often, that for the sake of convenience I have generally mentioned him by name, rather than his work, as my authority; and for the same reason I have mentioned Judge Sewall rather than his *Diary*.

1642.

Mr. Sibley, in his *Harvard Graduates* (I. 15), says that the first Commencement of the College came probably in October, 1642; but a careful reading of the letter printed on the next two pages of that work shows that it took place shortly before September 26. Mr. Sibley, doubtless, supposed October to have been the date, as it occurred in that month during the next year. According to Winthrop's "*History of New England*," the first Commencement happened on Thursday, September 22, as under that date the author writes: "Nine bachelors commenced at Cambridge; they were young men of good hope, and performed their acts, so as gave good proof of their proficiency in the tongues and arts" (II. 105).

1643.

During this year Commencement occurred in October, but the exact day is unknown. In the Historical Library is a copy of the printed Theses used at Commencement, and it is dated at "*Cantabrigiæ Nov. Ang. Mens. 8. 1643.*"

See *Proceedings* (IV. 444-446) for March, 1860, and (2d series, IX. 413) for February, 1895; and Sibley's *Harvard Graduates* (I. 74-76).

1644-1646.

For these three years I can find no contemporary records.

1647.

The Historical Library owns an imperfect copy of the printed Theses for this year, but the imprint at the foot of



the sheet is "*Cantabrigiæ Nov: Ang: 6. Calend. Sextilis. 1647,*" — which day fell on July 27, the last Tuesday of the month.

1648.

I find no record of the date, but perhaps it was the last Tuesday of July.

1649.

The Historical Library possesses a small pamphlet entitled :

Oratio Quam Comitij Cantabrigiensibus Americanis Peroravit reverendissimus D.D. Samuel Whiting Pastor Linnensis; in aula scilicet Harvardina, Pridie Calendas Sextiles, Anno, M.DC.XL.IX. No titlepage. 16mo. pp. 16.

This date came on July 31, the last Tuesday of the month.

1650.

According to the College Steward's Account-Books, as printed in the Appendix to the first volume of Sibley's Harvard Graduates (pp. 548, 549), Commencement fell on July 30, the last Tuesday of the month. The date is found in the entries set severally against the names of Mildmay, Mather, and Stoughton, viz.: "Commencement day 30 of July"; "Debitor 30-5-50 'being the day of Commencement'"; and "his 'Commencement Chardge,' 30-5-50."

1651.

Edward Johnson, in his "Wonder-Working Providence of Sions Saviour in New-England" (chapter 19, page 166), while speaking of the College, says: —

The number of Students is much encreased of late, so that the present year 1651. on the twelfth of the sixth moneth, ten of them took the degree of Batchelors of Art, among whom the Sea-born son of Mr. *Iohn Cotton* was one, some Gentlemen have sent their sons hither from *England*, who are to be commended for their care of them, as the judicious as the godly Doctor *Ames*, and divers others.

This extract from the "Wonder-Working Providence" fixes the day as August 12, the second Tuesday of the month, which is confirmed also by the entries after the several names

of Cotton, Dudley, Butler, and Burr, as found in Sibley (I. 551, 552). During the year 1651 the change appears to have been made from the last Tuesday in July to the second Tuesday of August.

1652.

No contemporary records found.

1653.

According to an entry after the name of Samuel Phillips in Sibley (I. 550), the day fell on "9-6-53," August 9, the second Tuesday of the month. For a confirmation of this date, see also page 322 of the same work.

1654.

See the entry after the name of Michael Wigglesworth in Sibley (I. 551), which gives the Commencement charges on "8-6-54," August 8, the second Tuesday.

1655.

The day came "Decimoquarto Die Sextilis 1655," August 14, which was the second Tuesday,—according to a programme reprinted in Sibley (I. 322).

1656.

According to Sibley (I. 358), it was "Duodecimo Die Sextilis, M.DC.LVI."—August 12, the second Tuesday.

1657.

No contemporary records found.

1658.

Under the name of John Barsham in Sibley (I. 539) is the following: "Att the 10-6-58 by his Comencment Chardges £3,"—which date fell on August 10, the second Tuesday of the month.

1659.

The programme reprinted in Sibley (I. 593) gives the date as "Die Nono Sextilis: M.DC.LIX."—which was August 9, the second Tuesday. See also the same volume (page 562)

for the following entry after John Eliot's name: "Debitor from 10-7-52 to 9-6-59," which last date came on August 9, and is an additional confirmation of the date.

1660.

According to a list of "Quæstiones" printed in Sibley (I. 488), the day came "Decimo-Quarto Die Sextilis 1660," August 14, the second Tuesday of the month.

1661 and 1662.

No contemporary records found for these two years.

1663-1666.

The "Quæstiones in Philosophia Discutiendæ," as found in the second volume of Sibley, on pages 53, 72, 101, and 133, give the dates as falling respectively "Undecimo Die Sextilis" (August 11), "Die Nono Sextilis" (August 9), "Die Octavo Sextilis" (August 8), and "Die Decimo Quarto Sextilis" (August 14), all which days fell on the second Tuesday of the month.

1667.

No contemporary records found.

1668-1670.

According to the programmes reprinted in Sibley (II. 163, 205), Commencement occurred "Die Undecimo-Sextilis" (August 11) in the year 1668, and "Die Decimo Sextilis" (August 10) in 1669; and, according to a programme in the library of this Society, the day fell "die nono Sextilis" (August 9) in 1670, — in each instance the second Tuesday of the month.

1671.

Sibley (II. 381) says: "August 8, Adams 'was admitted to y^e degree of Batchelour of Arts . . . under y^e Reverend Charles Chancey President.'" The day fell on the second Tuesday of the month.

Sewall (I. Introduction, xiii, xiv) writes: —

At this time the commencement was in August. In the year 1667 my father brought me to be admitted, by which means I heard Mr Richard Mather of Dorchester preach Mr Wilson's Funeral Sermon. "Your

Fathers where are they?" I was admitted by the very learned and pious Mr Charles Chauncey, who gave me my first Degree in the year 1671. There were no Masters in that year. These Bachelours were the last Mr Chauncey gave a degree to, for he died the February following.

Without doubt there was no printed programme for this year, as there were then no candidates for the second degree.

1672 and 1673.

No contemporary records found for these two years. During this period the customary way of giving the date of Commencement on the college programme was changed, and the Roman system adopted.

1674-1676.

According to a programme for 1674 reprinted in Sibley (II. 335), the day came "Tertio Idus Sextiles" (August 11), the second Tuesday; and this date is confirmed by a note in John Sherman's Almanac for that year. According to another programme for 1675 in the same work (II. 413, 414), the day came "Quarto Iduum Sextilium" (August 10), the second Tuesday. This date is borne out by an entry in Increase Mather's manuscript diary belonging to the Historical Library, as follows: "10) [1675] At Commencement at Cambridge" (page 26). According to still another for 1676 in Sibley (II. 415), the day fell "Sexto Idus Sextiles" (August 8), the second Tuesday. In Increase Mather's diary (page 73) is the following: "8) [1676] At Commencement in Cambridge." This date is confirmed in part by an entry in Sewall's Diary, where the day is placed undated between July 28 and August 12 in the manuscript copy, though unfortunately in the printed edition (I. 15) it is given under July 28.

1677.

No contemporary records found.

1678.

According to Sibley (II. 447), the day fell "Idibus Sextilibus" (August 13), the second Tuesday.

1679.

Sibley (II. 481) says: "Pridie Idus Sextiles" (August 12), Tuesday; and this is confirmed by an entry in John Danforth's Almanac for that year.

1680.

Sibley (II. 500) says: "Ante Diem IV Idus Sextiles" (August 10), Tuesday, which is confirmed by a memorandum under that date in John Foster's Almanac for 1680. See also an allusion to the day in Quincy's "History of Harvard University" (I. 472), at the bottom of the page.

1681.

"Die quinto ante Idus Sextiles" (August 9), Tuesday. See Sibley (III. 1), and an entry in Foster's Almanac for 1681 under that date; also Sewall (II. 14*) for an allusion to Commencement.

Cotton Mather, in his manuscript diary for 1681, writes: —

9^d 6^m This Day, I took my second Degree proceeding *Master of Arts*.

My Father, was *præsident*, so that from his Hand I Received my Degree.

Tis when I am gott almost Half, a year, beyond *Eighteen*, in my Age.

And all y^e Circumstances of my Commencement, were ordered by a very sensibly kind Providence of God.

My *Thesis* was *Puncta Hebraica sunt Originis Divinæ*.

1682.

"Die Sexto ante Idus Sextiles MDCLXXXII." (August 8), Tuesday. See Sibley (III. 170); and also a note in William Brattle's Almanac for 1682 under that date. In opposition to this, however, is the word "Commencement," in Sewall's handwriting after September 13, in the same almanac, which day fell on Wednesday. It is not easy to explain this discrepancy.

At the bottom of the page under August, Brattle gives the following lines:—

Commencement's come, but (friendly) I Advize
 All sorts of Rabble now their Homes to prize,
 For if to it they come, so Blind they 'll bee,
 That Really no Body they will see.
 Now *Sol* to *Virgo* goes, & there does stay,
 Till that his Heat does very much Decay.

Do they have reference to the drinking-habits of that period?

1683.

In Cotton Mather's Almanac for this year the printed announcement of Commencement comes after the date, September 12, which was the second Wednesday of the month. I find no other contemporary authority for the statement that it fell on that day, — as it probably did also on the corresponding day in the preceding year.

1684.

Sibley (III. 210) says: "Calend: Quintilis" (July 1), which came on Tuesday. See Noadiah Russell's Almanac and Benjamin Gillam's Almanac for a confirmation of this date; and also Peirce's "History of Harvard University" (page 49) for other authority.

A letter under date of December 9, 1683, written by John Rogers, President of the College, and by Samuel Andrew, a Fellow, and John Cotton, also a Fellow and the Librarian, to Increase Mather, who was then the senior Fellow, gives the reason why a change in the day was made for 1684. It is found in the Collections (4th series, VIII. 521, 522) of the Society, and is as follows:—

REVEREND SIR,— We are heartily sorry that we are enforced to give you the trouble of these lines; the purport whereof is to signify our great dissatisfaction with the stated time of the Commencem^t, on the first Wensday in July next; the occasion whereof is, that upon that very day wil fall out a grand Eclipse of the Sun, which was not foreseen, or at least, thought of, upon the last meeting of the Corporation. What reflection wilbee vpon our oversight of it, or upon our persisting, notwithstanding we have still the opportunity of correcting it, before the Almanack come forth; as also how obstructive the Eclipse wilbee as to the busines of the day, is very obvious. Wee are not superstitious in it, but reckon it very inconvenient. If, therefore, yourself

shal joyne with us, and improve your interest once more with the Hono^red Overseers, to alter and confirme the day on the 2^d Wensday in July, or for this p^rsent turne on the first Tuesday in July, or the forementioned 2^d Wednesday, it shal be most grateful and obliging to us.

Sir, praying a blessing upon al your labo^rs, and begging your prayers for us, we kisse your hands, & are

Your friends & servants,

J. ROGERS.

SAMUEL ANDREW.

JNO. COTTON.

CAMBRIDGE, 9, 10, 83.

1685.

In the almanacs for this year, prepared respectively by William Williams and Nathaniel Mather, Commencement is noted after Wednesday, July 1; but as there were no graduates in 1682, there were no candidates for the Master's degree, and consequently no programme was printed. Sewall (I. 85) also gives the same date.

1686.

According to Sibley (III. 242), the day fell "Nonis Julii" (July 7), Wednesday; and this date is confirmed both by Danforth's Almanac and Mather's.

1687.

According to Sibley (III. 270), the day occurred "Pridie Nonarum Julii" (July 6); and this date is borne out both by the Cambridge Ephemeris (William Williams's?) and Tulley's Almanac for 1687. Sewall (I. 181) has the following entry:

Wednesday, July 6. Waited on his Excellency to Cambridge. Eleven Bachelors and Seven Masters proceeded. Mr. Mather, President, Pray'd forenoon and afternoon. Mr. Ratcliff sat in the Pulpit by the Governour's direction. Mr. Mather crav'd a Blessing and return'd Thanks in the Hall.

Mr. Ratcliffe was a clergyman of the Church of England; and without doubt Andros intended in this way to annoy or insult the great body of Congregationalists, who then governed the College.

1688.

Sibley (III. 316) says: "Quarto Nonarum Julii" (July 4); and this is confirmed by Sewall (I. 219), who writes:—

Wednesday, July 4. Commencement managed wholly by Mr. W^m Hubbard; compared Sir William [Phips], in his Oration, to Jason fetching the Golden Fleece. Masters proceeded, no Bachelours.

At that time Increase Mather, President of the College, was in England on public business. See Collections (4th series, VIII. 671) for a letter written to him by his nephew Warham Mather, a graduate of 1685, which gives an account of the Commencement exercises, when he took his second degree.

1689.

According to the programme reprinted in Sibley (III. 353), the day fell "tertio Idus Septembris" (September 11), Wednesday, though the reason for postponement is not now clear. Tulley's Almanac for 1689, printed months before Commencement, gives July 3 as the date. Perhaps the change was due to the political troubles of that period.

1690.

Sibley (III. 368) gives the date "Sexto Nonas Quintilis" (July 2), Wednesday; and Newman's Almanac says the same. Under date of July 2, 1690, Sewall (I. 323, 324) writes:—

Go to Cambridge by Water in the Barge, wherein the Governour [Bradstreet], Major General [Winthrop], Capt. Blackwell, Mr. Addington, Allen, Willard and others: Had the Tide homeward. Thirty Commencers besides Mr. [Nathaniel] Rogers, Sir [Samuel] Mather, and Mr. [John] Emmerson. Sir Mather in England yet had a Degree conferred on him. Mr. Rogers and Emmerson should have Commenc'd last year, but were hindred by Sickness.

1691.

There were no graduates in 1688, and on that account no candidates for the Master's degree in 1691. Presumably there was no printed programme for Commencement; but Newman's Almanac gives as the date July 1, which occurred on Wednesday. Henry Newman, who compiled it, was a graduate in the Class of 1687, and he showed his loyalty to *Alma Mater* by placing on the titlepage, after the age of the World, and the time since the Flood, the number of years since the "Founding of Harvard Colledge." In this particular the author fol-

lowed the example of William Brattle, William Williams, and Samuel Danforth, who also were graduates, and, respectively, wrote almanacs for the years 1682, 1685, and 1686.

1692.

Sibley (III. 404) says: "Die Sexto Quintilis" (July 6), the first Wednesday of the month; and this date is confirmed by H. B.'s Almanac for that year.

1693.

Tulley's Almanac gives July 5, Wednesday, as the date.

1694.

Sewall (I. 390) writes: "July 4 [Wednesday], 1694. Waited on the Governour to the Commencement." An Almanac for this year, "By Philo - - - - Mathemat," probably a pseudonym of William Brattle, gives the same date.

1695.

John Tulley notes the day after July 3, Wednesday.

1696.

Tulley gives the date as July 1, Wednesday.

1697.

Sewall (I. 456) has the following entry:—

July, 7. 1697. I ride with my wife and Mr. Stoddard and his wife to the Commencement. Mr. Willard, W^m Hubbard, Cotton, [of] Plimouth, Whiting, Brinsmead not there.

This date, which fell on Wednesday, is confirmed by Tulley in his Almanac.

1698.

According to Sewall (I. 481), the day came between June 28 and July 13, but Tulley gives it definitely as Wednesday, July 6.

1699.

Tulley says that it occurred on Wednesday, July 5.

1700.

The same authority gives it on Wednesday, July 3.

SUMMARY.

1642	September 22	Thursday	1672		
1643	October		1673		
1644			1674	August 11	Tuesday
1645			1675	August 10	Tuesday
1646			1676	August 8	Tuesday
1647	July 27	Tuesday	1677		
1648			1678	August 13	Tuesday
1649	July 31	Tuesday	1679	August 12	Tuesday
1650	July 30	Tuesday	1680	August 10	Tuesday
1651	August 12	Tuesday	1681	August 9	Tuesday
1652			1682	September 13 ?	Wednesday ?
1653	August 9	Tuesday	1683	September 12	Wednesday
1654	August 8	Tuesday	1684	July 1	Tuesday
1655	August 14	Tuesday	1685	July 1	Wednesday
1656	August 12	Tuesday	1686	July 7	Wednesday
1657			1687	July 6	Wednesday
1658	August 10	Tuesday	1688	July 4	Wednesday
1659	August 9	Tuesday	1689	September 11	Wednesday
1660	August 14	Tuesday	1690	July 2	Wednesday
1661			1691	July 1	Wednesday
1662			1692	July 6	Wednesday
1663	August 11	Tuesday	1693	July 5	Wednesday
1664	August 9	Tuesday	1694	July 4	Wednesday
1665	August 8	Tuesday	1695	July 3	Wednesday
1666	August 14	Tuesday	1696	July 1	Wednesday
1667			1697	July 7	Wednesday
1668	August 11	Tuesday	1698	July 6	Wednesday
1669	August 10	Tuesday	1699	July 5	Wednesday
1670	August 9	Tuesday	1700	July 3	Wednesday
1671	August 8	Tuesday			

[This leaf is to be appended to "A List of Commencement Days
at Harvard College, 1642-1700."]

AT a meeting of the MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL SOCIETY, held in Boston, on Thursday, November 14, 1895, Dr. SAMUEL A. GREEN communicated the following notes:—

During a recent visit at Worcester I had an opportunity to examine some early New England almanacs belonging to the American Antiquarian Society, which are not found in the Historical Library; and from them I have gleaned the dates of a few Commencement Days at Cambridge, which are in addition to the List presented at the meeting of this Society held on May 9 last.

1657.

According to an Almanac (Cambridge) by S. B., the day fell on Tuesday, August 11.

1662.

An imperfect copy of an Almanac for this year, lacking the titlepage and a few other leaves, fixes the date as Tuesday, August 12.

1667.

According to Samuel Brackenbury's Almanac (Cambridge), the date fell on Tuesday, August 13.

1672.

Jeremiah Shepard's Almanac (Cambridge) gives the day as Tuesday, August 13.

It will be noticed that these additional dates in every instance fell on the same day of the second week in August; and thus they confirm the theory that during the period from 1651 to 1681 Commencement always came on the second Tuesday of that month.

MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL SOCIETY,

DECEMBER 9, 1897.

Dr. SAMUEL A. GREEN made the following remarks: —

I wish to communicate the dates of two early Commencements at Cambridge, derived from contemporary sources, which are additional to the list previously presented by me, and printed in the Proceedings (second series, X. 194-205, 360) for May and November, 1895. The dates are taken from two almanacs in the Watkinson Library at Hartford; and in both instances they fall on the second Tuesday of August, thus confirming the theory that during this period Commencement came on that day.

1673.

According to an Almanac (Cambridge) for this year, by N. H., — who perhaps was Nehemiah Hobart, the graduate of 1667, — the day fell on Tuesday, August 12.

1677.

According to an Almanac (Cambridge), by J. S., — who was the Reverend John Sherman, third minister of Watertown, — the day came on Tuesday, August 14.

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